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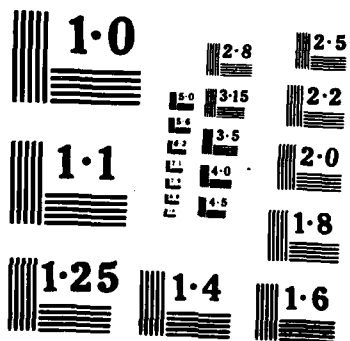
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THE FUTURE COURSE OF INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM

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## THE FUTURE COURSE OF INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM<sup>1</sup>

International terrorism emerged as a problem in the late 1960s and despite increased government efforts to combat it, terrorism remains a serious problem in the 1980s. Will terrorism continue? Yes.

Political violence in one form or another has existed for centuries. Earlier waves of terrorist violence at the beginning of the century and again in the 1920s and 1930s were eclipsed only by world wars.

Terrorist activity accompanied post-war decolonization, which continued up through the 1960s. Some of the colonial liberation movements, most notably the Algerian FLN, provided a model for later terrorist groups.

Modern theories of guerrilla war--which, of course, is not synonymous with terrorism but did contribute doctrinally to the use of terrorist tactics--developed during this same period, from the late 1940s to the early 1960s. World War II represented the culmination of state-organized violence. Since then, there has been a long range trend toward the "privatization" of violence.

All of these facts argue for the continuation of some kind of political violence outside of conventional warfare, but will international terrorism persist in its present form? I think it will, for a number of reasons:

International terrorism as we know it today had its origins in the political circumstances that prevailed at the end of the 1960s: the frustration of the Palestinian Arabs after Israel's crushing defeat of the Arab armies in 1967; the failure of Latin America's guerrillas to duplicate the success of Castro's revolution in Cuba and their increasing attention to the struggle in the cities, which led to the increasing use of terrorist tactics; the war in Vietnam, which galvanized a generation of youth in America, Western Europe, and Japan

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<sup>1</sup>This paper was presented by the author to the International Conference on Current Trends in World Terrorism, Tel Aviv, Israel, July 1-4, 1985.

to protest in the streets, and resulted in a few at the extremist fringe carrying on the protest with guns and bombs.

But, contemporary international terrorism also reflected some recent technological developments which enhanced the use of terrorist tactics:

- Modern air travel provided unprecedented worldwide mobility.
- Radio, television, and communications satellites provided almost instantaneous access to a worldwide audience.
- Weapons and explosives became increasingly available to anybody with the money to buy them.
- Modern society offered new vulnerabilities, in particular, airplanes.

Political circumstances may change but these technological developments have permanently altered the environment.

The first generation of modern terrorists has provided a model of behavior. Terrorist tactics have become a routine way of focusing attention on a dispute, of bringing pressure on a government. New causes and new groups have emerged--Armenian terrorists, Sikh terrorists, issue-oriented groups opposed to nuclear power, abortion, technology, pollution, animal vivisection. There certainly will be no lack of causes.

There are economic incentives to use terrorist tactics. Kidnapping and extortion based upon threats of violence have become routine means of financing revolutionary movements.

A semi-permanent infrastructure of support has emerged. Beneath the terrorist groups, and supporting them often without regard to ideology or cause, is an ephemeral but resilient network of connections, alliances, safe houses, arms suppliers, and provisioners of counterfeit documents and other services. This network resembles the infrastructure that supports organized crime.

States have recognized in terrorism a useful weapon and are exploiting it for their own purposes. To a certain extent, international terrorism has become institutionalized.

And, increasingly, terrorism is expected and "tolerated."

All these reasons suggest that terrorism as we know it now is likely to persist as a mode of political expression for various groups, and as a means of warfare among states. It probably will continue, but at what level? **Will we see more or less terrorism?**

Measured by the number of incidents, terrorism has increased in volume over the last 17 years. It is a ragged increase, with peaks and valleys, but the overall trajectory is clearly upward. There were, for example, four times as many incidents of international terrorism in 1984 as there were in 1972, the year of the Munich attack. Insofar as we can tell, the increase is genuine--it is not due merely to better reporting. The increase in the late 1970s and the early 1980s was quite dramatic. Terrorist activity, according to our figures, leveled off in 1984, but based upon the figures from the first five months of this year, it looks as if 1985 will surpass all previous years in the volume of activity.

Overall, the annual growth rate in the volume of terrorist activity has been in the area of 12 to 15 percent. If that rate of increase continues, we could see something between 800 and 900 incidents a year by the end of the decade, which is not inconceivable given the other factors I have mentioned.

There are several other factors which suggest the likelihood of continued growth:

1. The increase in the volume of terrorist activity has been matched by its geographic spread--a slow, long-term trend. The number of countries experiencing some sort of terrorist activity each year has gradually increased.
2. Although a handful of nations--the United States, France, Israel, the United Kingdom, and Turkey--remain the favorite targets of terrorists and account for approximately half of all the victims, the number of nations targeted by terrorists has also increased. Last year, we saw terrorist attacks directed against the nationals of 60 countries.



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3. Although it is difficult to monitor with any precision the appearance and disappearance of the many hundreds of groups that claim credit for terrorist actions--some of them are only fictitious banners--the level of international terrorist activity no longer appears to depend on a handful of groups. Despite the virtual destruction of some terrorist groups and the decline in operations by others, the total volume of terrorist activity grows.
4. As international communications spread, as populations move or are pushed about--two features of the 1980s--I suspect we may see more local conflicts manifesting themselves at the international level through terrorist tactics.

**Will terrorists escalate?** Simply killing a lot of people has seldom been a terrorist objective. As I have said on numerous occasions, terrorists want a lot of people *watching*, not a lot of people *dead*. Terrorists operate on the principle of the minimum force necessary. They find it unnecessary to kill many, as long as killing a few suffices for their purposes.

Statistics bear this out. Only 15 to 20 percent of all terrorist incidents involve fatalities; and of those, two-thirds involve only one death. Less than 1 percent of the thousands of terrorist incidents that have occurred in the last two decades involve 10 or more fatalities, and incidents of mass murder are truly rare.

Arbitrarily taking 100 deaths as the criterion, only a handful of incidents of this scale have occurred since the beginning of the century. Lowering the criterion to 50 deaths produces a dozen or more additional incidents. To get even a meaningful sample, the criterion has to be lowered to 25. This in itself suggests that it is either very hard to kill large numbers of persons, or it is very rarely tried.

Unfortunately, as we have seen in recent years, things are changing. Terrorist activity over the last 20 years has escalated in volume *and* in bloodshed. At the beginning of the 1970s, terrorists concentrated their attacks on property. In the 1980s, according to U.S. government statistics, half of all terrorist attacks have been directed



against people. The number of incidents with fatalities and multiple fatalities has increased. A more alarming trend in the 1980s has been the growing number of incidents of large-scale indiscriminate violence: huge car bombs detonated on city streets, bombs planted aboard trains and airliners, in airline terminals, railroad stations, and hotel lobbies, all calculated to kill in quantity. Ten major international terrorist incidents have resulted in a total of more than 1000 deaths in the last 15 years, but more than two-thirds of these have occurred in the last two years.

There are several explanations for the escalation:

1. Like soldiers in a war, terrorists who have been in the field for many years have been brutalized by the long struggle; killing becomes easier.
2. As terrorism has become more commonplace, the public has become to a degree desensitized. Terrorists can no longer obtain the same amount of publicity using the same tactics they used 10 years ago, and they may feel compelled to escalate their violence in order to keep public attention or to recover coercive power lost as governments have become more resistant to their demands.
3. Terrorists have become technically more proficient, enabling them to operate on a higher level of violence.
4. The composition of some terrorist groups has changed as the faint-hearted who have no stomach for indiscriminate killing drop out or are shoved aside by more ruthless elements.
5. The religious aspect of current conflicts in the Middle East pushes toward mass murder. As we have seen throughout history, the presumed approval of God for the killing of pagans, heathens, or infidels can permit acts of great destruction and self-destruction.
6. And finally, state sponsorship has provided terrorists with the resources and technical know-how to operate at a higher, more lethal level of violence.

At the same time, several factors work against escalation: There are self-imposed constraints, which I will address later, and there are technical ceilings. Without resorting to more exotic weapons, terrorists are approaching limits to their violence. The deadliest terrorist incidents--huge bombs detonated in buildings, the bomb presumably detonated aboard the Air India jumbo jet, a deliberately set fire in a crowded Teheran theater--each of which produced several hundred deaths, roughly equal the worst accidental disasters: hotel fires, explosions, airline crashes. Death on a larger scale is seen only in the slaughter of great battles or in natural disasters like earthquakes and floods. The most plausible scenarios involving chemical or biological weapons in a contained environment--a hotel, a convention, a banquet--would produce deaths in the hundreds. To get above that, terrorists would have to possess large quantities of deadly substances and solve problems of dispersal, or they would have to resort to nuclear weapons. But this raises questions of technical capacity and intentions, which I will deal with momentarily.

A third limiting factor is security. Protective measures taken in the wake of the huge car and truck bombings in the Middle East are reducing the vulnerability of the most obvious targets to this type of attack. More stringent security measures may be applied on a permanent basis to prevent a repeat of the Air India bombing. Of course, terrorists can obviate these by shifting their sights to other, still vulnerable targets, but security measures force them to become even less discriminate.

On balance, it appears that incidents involving significant fatalities probably will become more common, with incidents resulting in hundreds of deaths remaining for the foreseeable future the outer limit of terrorist violence.

**What changes will we see in terrorist tactics?** I don't think we will see much tactical innovation. Terrorists operate with a fairly limited repertoire. Six basic tactics have accounted for 95 percent of all terrorist incidents: bombings, assassinations, armed assaults, kidnappings, hijackings, and barricade and hostage incidents. Looking at it another way, terrorists blow up things, kill people, or seize

hostages. Every terrorist incident is merely a variation on these three activities.

There have been few changes in tactics over the years. Indeed, the relative percentage of the various tactics has remained stable for a number of years, except for a decline in barricade and hostage incidents. Seizing embassies was a popular tactic in the 1970s. It declined as security measures made embassy takeovers more difficult, and as governments became more resistant to the demands of terrorists holding hostages and more willing to use force to end such episodes, thus increasing the hostage-takers' risk of death or capture.

This is indicative of the kind of innovation we are likely to see. Terrorists innovate in an incremental way to solve specific problems created by security measures. If one tactic ceases to work, they abandon it in favor of another one or merely shift their sights to another target. Since terrorists have virtually unlimited targets, they have little need for tactical innovation.

For example, how might terrorists respond to the new security measures aimed at protecting embassies against car bombs? Conceivably, they might resort to aerial suicide attacks, which are technically and physically more demanding. Or they might resort to standoff attacks, the traditional response to strong defenses. Or they might simply detonate large bombs at other, still vulnerable targets. This brings me to the next question.

**What changes will we see in terrorist targets?** The greatest advantage that terrorists have and will continue to have is a virtually unlimited range of targets. Terrorists can attack anything, anywhere, anytime, limited only by operational considerations: Terrorists do not attack defended targets; they seek soft targets. If one target or set of targets is well protected, terrorists merely shift their sights to other targets that are not so well protected.

Over the years, the range of targets attacked by terrorists has expanded enormously. They now include embassies, airlines, airline terminals, ticket offices, trains, railroad stations, subways, buses, power lines, electrical transformers, mailboxes, mosques, hotels, restaurants, schools, libraries, churches, temples, newspapers, journalists, diplomats, businessmen, military officials, missionaries, priests, nuns, the Pope, men, women, adults, and children.

There are a few things terrorists have not done. With the exception of a couple of minor episodes, they have not attacked nuclear reactors. With the exception of a few groups that have special maritime capabilities, terrorists have not gone to sea. They have not tried to hijack ships at sea or take over offshore platforms. Terrorists have blown up computers and set fires in data processing centers, but they have not tried to penetrate computers in any sophisticated fashion to disrupt or destroy data.

What will be the future targets of terrorism? Pretty much the same ones they prefer today:

- Representatives of governments and symbols of nations--notably, diplomats and airlines.
- Representatives of economic systems--corporations and corporate executives.
- Symbols of policies and presence--military officials.
- Political leaders (in the past 15 years, terrorists have killed, tried to kill, or have been reported on their way to kill Carrero Blanco, Aldo Moro, Lord Mountbatten, Anwar Sadat, the Pope, Ronald Reagan, Indira Gandhi, and Margaret Thatcher).

**Will terrorists attack high-technology targets such as refineries, offshore platforms, or nuclear reactors?** They already have, although in technically undemanding ways. Terrorists blown up pylons and transformers, sometimes causing widespread blackouts. Guerrillas in Latin America have frequently attacked electrical power grids as a means of waging economic warfare against governments. Less concerned with economic warfare, urban terrorists have attacked electrical energy systems to get attention, to protest government or corporate policies, or to indirectly disable nuclear power plants. Terrorist saboteurs have also attacked pipelines, oil tank farms, and refineries, again with the objective of attracting publicity or protesting specific policies. These targets will remain attractive to some groups. However, apparently not all terrorists see value in attacking energy systems. There is no discernible trend toward more frequent attacks. Moreover,

to seriously disrupt energy systems requires either a sustained campaign or larger-scale action at certain critical nodes. Targets such as nuclear reactors or offshore platforms are technically demanding and require certain knowledge and skills.

Overall, attacks on high-technology targets must be anticipated as a feature of guerrilla warfare, but they are likely to remain only an occasional event in the realm of terrorism. State sponsorship, however, may alter targeting preferences.

Will we see a more sophisticated "white collar" terrorism, that is, attacks on telecommunications, data processing systems, or other targets where the terrorists' objective is not crude destruction but widespread disruption? Disruptive "terrorism" of this type may be more appealing to armchair terrorists than to those who are active in today's terrorist groups. We may occasionally see terrorist incidents of this type, but probably not many. Such operations are technically demanding, and they produce *no immediate visible effects*. There is no drama. No lives hang in the balance. There is no bang, no blood. They do not satisfy the hostility of the terrorists.

What weapons will terrorists use in the future? Terrorists now use what is readily available in the gunshops and arsenals or on the black market. They seek powerful, rapid-fire, concealable weapons. They use commercial explosives, military stuff when they can get it. These suffice for current operations. Since terrorists generally do not attack defended targets, they have no need for more advanced arms. They now match the firepower of the authorities. They have no need for sophisticated weapons. Terrorists probably will use more sophisticated explosives, in larger quantities, although there is no great need to increase quantity. Terrorists in the Middle East have on several occasions built bombs containing more than a thousand pounds of explosives. Car bombs with 200 or more pounds of explosives are not uncommon. Fifteen to 20 pounds of Frangex planted inside a large building will take its front off.

We will probably see increased use of standoff weapons--mortars, rocket launchers, rocket propelled grenades--to overcome security measures. Finally, there remains a potential for the use of portable precision-guided munitions, which terrorists already have employed on several occasions.

**Will terrorists resort to weapons of mass destruction? Will they employ chemical or biological warfare? Will terrorists go nuclear?** Many people believe that nuclear terrorism of some sort is likely and may be inevitable. Reflecting the results of a poll conducted among 1,346 opinion leaders in the United States, George Gallup Jr., in his recent book, *Forecast 2000*, wrote that "while a war between the superpowers, the U.S. and the Soviet Union, is a real cause for concern, [a disastrous nuclear incident involving terrorists in this country] seems to be the most imminent danger."

I happen to think nuclear terrorism is neither imminent nor inevitable--if by nuclear terrorism we mean terrorists employing stolen nuclear weapons or a clandestinely fabricated nuclear explosive device to kill or threaten to kill large numbers of people. Lesser terrorist acts in the nuclear domain are possible--the seizure or attempted sabotage of a nuclear reactor, the dispersal of radioactive material, an alarming nuclear hoax that may cause panic.

The question of nuclear terrorism involves an assessment of both capabilities and motivations. It is conceivable that someone outside of government who is familiar with the principles of nuclear weapons could design an atomic bomb. However, the ease with which someone outside of government can build one, assuming he or she had somehow acquired the necessary nuclear material, has been great exaggerated. But let's for a moment say they can. Would they want to? Terrorism has certainly escalated, but it is still a quantum jump from the kinds of things that terrorists do today to the realms of nuclear destruction. Why would terrorists take that jump?

As I said before, simply killing a lot of people is not an objective of terrorism. Terrorists could do more now, yet they don't. Why? Beyond the technical constraints, there may be self-imposed constraints that derive from moral considerations or political calculations. Some terrorists may view indiscriminate violence as immoral. The terrorists' enemy is the government, not the people. Also, terrorists pretend to be governments, and wanton murder might imperil this image.

There are political considerations as well: Terrorists fear alienating their perceived constituents. They fear provoking public revulsion. They fear unleashing government crackdowns that their groups might not survive. Certainly, in the face of a nuclear threat, the rules that now limit police authorities in most democracies would change.

Terrorists must maintain group cohesion. Attitudes toward violence vary not only from group to group but also within a group. Inevitably, there would be disagreements over mass murder, which could expose the operation and the group to betrayal.

Obviously not all groups share the same operational code, and as we have seen, certain conditions or circumstances might erode these self-imposed constraints.

What about chemical or biological weapons, which are technically less demanding? Although there have been isolated incidents, neither chemical or biological warfare seems to fit the pattern of most terrorist attacks. These attacks are generally intended to produce immediate dramatic effects.

Terrorist incidents have a finite quality--an assassination, a bombing, a handful of deaths, and that is the end of the episode.

Finally, the terrorists retain control. That is quite different from initiating an event that offers no explosion but instead produces indiscriminate deaths and lingering illness, an event over which the terrorists who set it in motion would have little control. For the near-term future--say, the next five years--we are more likely to see threats of chemical or biological contamination made by authentic lunatics or criminal extortionists. There will be moments of alarm. Over the long-term--the next 10 to 15 years--my concern is that chemical weaponry will be acquired by unstable dangerous countries like Iraq, Iran, or Syria, and will increasingly be used in warfare. If chemical warfare becomes more commonplace, particularly in a region like the Middle East, we cannot dismiss its potential use by terrorists. The same is true of nuclear weapons, but probably over a longer time period.

Where will terrorism fit in the future of armed conflict? I think the current trend toward state sponsorship of terrorism will continue. As I have said before, limited conventional war, classic rural guerrilla, and international terrorism will coexist and may appear simultaneously. The Iranian revolution and its spread to Lebanon, which has involved the effective use of international terrorism as an instrument of policy, may provide a model for other Third World revolutions and revolutionary states, just as the Cuban model inspired a generation of imitators in Latin America. If it does, we are in for a lot of trouble.

- We also may see international terrorism emerge as a new kind of global guerrilla warfare in which terrorist groups sally forth from the political jungles of the Third World to carry out highly publicized hit-and-run attacks, militarily insignificant but politically of great consequence, avoiding confrontations where they might run into well-equipped, well-trained, specialized anti-terrorist forces.

Terrorists now avoid seizing embassies in Western capitals. They hijack airliners, keep them on the move to evade any rescue attempt, and retreat with their hostages to sanctuaries like Teheran or Beirut. Benefiting from the absence of government, as in Lebanon, or the presence of a hostile government, as in Iran, these sanctuaries lie beyond the reach of the world regime of treaty and law. If Iran defeats Iraq and the Gulf States fall, then the world's "badlands" might be centered in the Middle East, a crescent reaching from the Mediterranean to Persia.

Finally, what developments will we see in security? We will see an increased diversion of resources to internal security.

- The "privatization" of violence has been matched by the "privatization" of security, as illustrated by the tremendous growth of private sector security expenditures. In the United States, a total of \$21 billion is now spent annually for



security services and hardware (as compared with \$14 billion spent annually on all police). The figure will reach \$50 to \$60 billion a year by the end of the century. Private security corporations will grow to meet the demand.

We will see the further proliferation of inner perimeters, the rings of security that now surround airline terminals, government buildings, and, increasingly, corporate offices. From this last development, however, emerges a crude counter-terrorist strategy. By protecting the most obvious symbols, terrorists' preferred targets, terrorists will be forced to become less discriminate in their attacks. That will create greater public outrage, which governments can exploit to obtain domestic support and international cooperation to crush the terrorists.

In sum:

- Terrorism certainly will persist.
- Probably it will increase.
- Large-scale incidents will become more common.
- At the same time, I don't think terrorism will enter the mind-boggling world of high technology or mass destruction.
- In terms of tactics, targets, and weapons, terrorism will be for the foreseeable future a continuation of the past.
- States will continue to exploit terrorism--to use it for their own purposes. We may enter a protracted worldwide guerrilla war.
- And terrorists will create crises, forcing governments and corporations to divert more and more resources toward combatting them.

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